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ABSTRACT

A study examined whether the use of a listening station (comprised of books on tapes) would have a positive effect upon the reading interest of first graders. Subjects, 18 first grade children who were randomly selected from three reading groups in a suburban community school, were equally divided into an experimental and a control sample. While the experimental sample used the listening station at least three times a week for the length of the study (27 consecutive school days), the control sample did not use the listening station. Results indicated no significant differences between the experimental and the control samples, nor between children who were exposed to a variety of reading materials outside of school and those who were not. (Four tables of data and a figure are included, and 14 pages of a related research review and three pages of references are attached.) (JK)

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The Effects of a Listening Station Upon the Reading Interest of First Graders

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Master of Arts Degree in Reading Specialization

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Abstract

The study involved 18 children who were divided into an experimental and a control sample. It was hypothesized that a group of first graders who were exposed to talking books over a period of time would not develop a greater interest in reading than those who did not use the listening station. The study was conducted for 27 consecutive school days. The experimental sample used the listening station at least three times a week for the length of the study. Parent surveys were also used to determine the amount of outside influence the children in both groups were receiving. An analysis of the results showed that there was no significant difference between the two samples. It also indicated that children who were exposed to a variety of reading materials outside of school did not display a higher level of interest in reading books than those who did not.

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There have been several studies done to determine the effects of reading aloud to children. Ellen Demos (1984) stated that storytelling helps to set a purpose for the children and in turn they will want to learn to read.

However, according to Mary Monteith (1978) there is a lack of information available on how taped books are being used, why they are used and how effective they are.

In 1978, Berger and Andolina surveyed 454 school administrators to determine the degree of familiarity and implementation of taped books. Out of the 454 respondents, 88% were familiar with the books and did use them in their schools, 10% were familiar but there was no implementation and only one percent reported unfamiliarity.

Therefore since most schools are already equipped with listening stations, it is important that we look at the effect that talking books have on motivation. Carbo (1979) and Gamby (1983) agree that talking books have a positive effect on reading interest. In their opinion, these electronic devices build self confidence, as well as aid in the difficult transition from spoken laguage to written words. They also make the children willing to invest more time into learning to read.

Gamby says that she has used talking books beginning in first grade, before the children were reading, in order to provide them with good experiences involving books.

She has also found through her own experience, that children pass from talking books to reading real books when their ability improves to the point that they can get as much enjoyment from reading on their own as they do from the recorded books or at the point when the child feels that he/she can read faster themself.

If one looks at this information carefully, then several questions arise. Do children who use a listening station develop a greater interest in books than those who do not? Do they develop an interest in books sooner than those children who do not use the station? Will these children choose to read a book more frequently when they are offered a variety of activities?

These questions are primarily relevant to the primary grades. It has been said that educators should never underestimate the affective domain. Therefore, if through the use of listening stations, we are able to elevate the desire to read, then it would be important to dust off the tape recorders and the headphones and put them back into the classrooms. However, little evidence is available to support that decision.

HYPOTHESIS-

To provide additional evidence on this topic, the following study was conducted. It was hypothesized that

a group of first graders who were exposed to talking books over a period of time would not develop a greater interest in reading than those children who did not use the listening station.

DEFINITIONS-

In this study the term listening station refers to a tape recorder and six sets of headphones, while talking books are defined as books which are read orally by some individual and recorded onto cassette tapes. Each child has a printed version of this book of their own to follow along in. A listening center in this case is the place in the classroom where students go, three times a week, to listen to the talking books during free choice time. Free choice time is the time when children can choose an activity of their choice. (puzzles, books, coloring, lace up cards, etc.) A library for the purpose of this study is defined as a three tier shelf located in the classroom, containing books which the children may use during free choice time.

PROCEDURES-

This study was conducted to determine if the use of a listening station would have a positive effect upon the reading interest of first graders. There were two samples involved in this study, an experimental

sample and a control sample. The experimental sample contained nine first grade students. The population was from a suburban community and all the participants were white. The students, both male and female, were selected randomly from three reading groups (top, middle and low). There were four children chosen from the top group, three from the middle group and two from the low group. The control group also consisted of nine first graders from the same community. Once again they were randomly selected from the three reading groups. This sample contained three children form the top group, three from the middle and three from the low group.

The parents of both the control sample and the experimental sample were sent the questionaires shown on the following page to determine the extent of reading done at home. The forms were returned to school. The control group did not use the listening station at all during the study . The experimental group used the listening center during the morning hours, at least three times a week, for a 10-20 minute period. The amount of time spent at the center depended upon the length of the tape.

Figure 1

Parent Questionaire

Child's Name-_____

Please respond to the following questions by placing a check mark in the appropriate box.

	Frequently	Sometimes	Never
1. I read aloud to my child at home.			
2. Other adults read aloud to my child.			
3. My child asks me to read to him/her.			
4. There are books at home for my child.			
5. My child likes books.			
6. My child looks at or reads books by himself.			
7. My child has a library card.			
8. I take my child to the library for books.			
9. My child sees me reading at home.			
10. I try to encourage reading at home.			

The listening center contained many different sets of talking books. The books used during the sessions were determined by the teacher in order to assure a variety of titles.

The study was conducted for 27 consecutive school days. The experimental group was introduced to the listening station and continued to use it at least three times a week for the length of the study.

Immediately after lunch, both groups of children were given free choice time. This was a twenty minute period. A log was kept to show the number of books chosen during free choice time and also the students who chose them. The log sheets were tallied for both the experimental and the control groups. The results of the logs were compared and conclusions drawn.

Results-

The eighteen parent surveys were distributed. Of those eighteen questionaires, fifteen were completed and returned. Six of the fifteen were from the control sample and nine were from the experimental sample.

The responses as seen in Table 1 indicate that children in both samples received exposure to books outside of the school environment. Specific questions may be found in the procedures section of this report.

Table 1
Results of Parent Surveys
Experimental Sample

Question	Frequently	%	Sometimes	%	Never	%
#1	4	44%	5	56%	0	0%
#2	1	11%	8	89%	0	0%
#3	5	56%	4	44%	0	0%
#4	9	100%	0	0%	0	0%
#5	8	89%	1	11%	0	0%
#6	4	44%	5	56%	0	0%
#7	7	78%	0	0%	2	22%
#8	0	0%	9	100%	0	0%
#9	8	89%	1	11%	0	0%
#10	7	78%	2	22%	0	0%
Total	53	59%	35	39%	2	2%

Control Sample

Question	Frequently	%	Sometimes	%	Never	%
#1	4	67%	2	33%	0	0%
#2	0	0%	4	67%	2	33%
#3	4	67%	2	33%	0	0%
#4	6	100%	0	0%	0	0%
#5	5	83%	1	17%	0	0%
#6	4	67%	2	33%	0	0%
#7	4	67%	0	0%	2	33%
#8	3	50%	1	17%	2	33%
#9	4	67%	2	33%	0	0%
#10	5	83%	1	17%	0	0%
Total	39	65%	15	25%	6	10%

The children in the control sample were read aloud to more often than those in the experimental sample either by a parent or by some other adult. The children in the control sample also requested to be read to more often and did more independent reading.

It was reported that both samples contained books at home for the children. In the control sample, however, there was a higher percentage of children possessing library cards as well as visiting the library on a regular basis. Parents in the control sample reported a more frequent use of encouragement to read.

Overall, the control sample received a greater degree of outside influence than did the experimental sample.

The children were observed during quiet time for a period of six weeks which involved thirteen sessions in the listening center by the experimental sample. There were 117 times in which children in either sample could have chosen to look at books. The results listed in Table 2 indicate that the experimental sample chose books five percent less frequently than the control sample. This modest difference was not statistically significant.

Table 2
Types of Activities Chosen

	Books		Other Activity	
	# of times	%	# of times	%
Experimental Sample	12	10%	105	90%
Control Sample	18	15%	99	85%

The following statistics were evaluated in order to further investigate whether those children who did choose books during quiet time were also the children receiving influence at home. For the purposes of this study, it was assumed that children who had frequent exposure to books outside of school at least 70% of the time were labeled as having been influenced. The results are listed in tables 3 and 4.

Table 3
Children With Outside Influence

Control Group			Experimental Group		
Student	% outside influence	% chose books in school	Student	% outside influence	% chose books in school
#1	79%	0%	#1	70%	38%
#2	90%	8%	#2	80%	80%
#3	80%	15%	#3	80%	0%
			#4	70%	8%
AVG.	80%	8%	AVG.	75%	14%

Table 4

Children Not Receiving Outside Influence

Control Group			Experimental Group		
Student	% outside influence	% chose books in school	Student	% outside influence	% chose books in school
#1	40%	23%	#1	50%	8%
#2	40%	23%	#2	50%	0%
#3	50%	31%	#3	50%	0%
			#4	50%	0%
			#5	30%	1%
AVG.	43%	26%	AVG.	46%	2%

As can be seen in Table 3, children with outside influence in the experimental sample chose books in school more frequently than those in the control sample. However, as seen in Table 4, children with less outside influence who were in the control sample chose books more often than those in the experimental sample. It is important to note, however, that these results are based in part on the number of parent surveys which were returned. Perhaps if the other three questionaires for the control sample were returned, the results may have been different.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS-

The results of this study supported the hypothesis

that children who use the listening station in school would not have a higher degree of interest in reading than those who do not use the station, since there was no significant difference between the two groups. The study also indicated that children who were exposed to a variety of reading materials at home and those who were read to by adults outside of school did not display a higher level of interest in reading books.

The responses indicated by the adults surveyed show that the number of parents providing outside reading experiences was about equal to those not providing such experiences. However, both groups, those with outside influence and those without, chose an alternate activity to reading over 70% of the time. Therefore, there was no difference in interest in books between children receiving home influence and those who received very little influence.

The results indicate that when given the opportunity to select freely among activities, both groups chose another activity other than reading at least 85% of the time.

It is interesting to note however, that the children who did not receive outside influence and were in the control sample chose books more often than any other sample of children. It is also important to note that in contrast to the findings of this study, parents of the control

sample reported that their children frequently chose to look at books at home 67% of the time. The parents of the experimental sample reported that their children also frequently chose to read a book on their own, 44% of the time. This data, however, was not supported in the classroom.

The lack of time spent reading books in class may have been due to the fact that they were faced with too many other new and exciting activities. This may also account for the difference in parent surveys and classroom observations.

This implies that a follow up study should be done to determine at which time during the day the children chose to look at books at home. It might also be of value to note what their choices of activities were during the time they chose to read.

Based upon the conclusions of this, a replication study might be conducted using other alternate activities which may not be quite so inviting or use the same alternatives but introduce them awhile before the actual study begins.

Overall, it was concluded that even though parents reported children in both groups as having a high interest in books, the use of a listening station did not increase the level of reading interest in a sample of first grade children.

The Effects of a Listening Station Upon the Reading Interest of First Graders:

RELATED RESEARCH

According to Mary Monteith (1978), there is a lack of information available on how taped books are being used, why they are used, and how effective they are. Even computer searches have turned up few descriptions on the use of taped books and their effectiveness.

In 1978, Berger and Andolina surveyed 454 school administrators to determine the degree of familiarity and implementation of taped books. Out of the 454 respondents, 88% were familiar with the books and did use them in their schools, 10% were familiar but there was no implementation and only one percent reported unfamiliarity.

In 1976, Bliss described a program using taped books with secondary students. The study took place in the Barnweld schools in Wisconsin. Non readers in the seventh through twelfth grades were asked to practice reading during one period a day with the aid of tape recorders and record players. Bliss found that the talking books helped to increase the students self confidence and in turn the reading rate and school effort of these students increased. She also feels that recorded books used with accompanying texts can do a great deal to provide enjoyment of books for slow readers and gives them the opportunity to hear words pronounced correctly.

Another way that talking books are used in the classroom is with handicapped students. Marie Carbo

uses these books to teach severely handicapped students, including the learning diabled, educable retarded, emotionally disturbed and severely speech impaired. After three years of use, Carbo reports (1979) that her students have made substantial gains in comprehension, word recognition and word meaning. She says that teaching reading with the aid of these electronic devices appears to be particularly effective with children with memory problems, those who have difficulty using the phonic approach and with older children who due to repeated failure, are turned off to books. Carbo feels that with talking books, students make fewer reading errors, and the possibility of forming incorrect reading patterns is diminished. It is also Carbo's opinion that from the very beginning, talking books provide younsters with the correct reading model to imitate. As a result, the successful experiences build self confidence and makes children more willing to invest time and effort into learning to read.

Gert Gamby wrote an article in 1983, on how to use tape recorders and books as an alternative to the traditional methods of teaching reading. Gamby says that she has used talking books beginning in first grade, before the children were reading, in order to provide them with good experiences involving books. Through her own experience, she feels that talking

books aid pupils in the transition from spoken language to the more complicated written language. She has also found through her own experience that children pass from talking books to reading real books when their ability improves to the point that they can get as much enjoyment from reading on their own as they do from the recorded books or at the point when the child feels that he/she can read faster themself.

Leif Fearn (1971) conducted a study to examine the effect of auditory accompaniment in the developmental reading process. The sample included 112 fourth graders in two middle class urban schools. Each of the schools had what he called a treatment class and a control class. For 12 weeks, both classes were instructed according to the district's curriculum. However, the treatment classes listened to a taped narration of the material while they followed along in their books. Subjects were pre and post tested. The results indicated that it was beneficial to use some type of oral model as part of the instructional strategy. It also indicated that it may be legitimate to generalize the findings to poorer readers because it was least effective with children scoring at the upper extreme in acheivement tests. It was most effective in comprehension and total reading for those scoring at the lower extremes. Fearn points out the unintentional classroom procedure

of children modeling other pupils who manifest diverse inadequacies, and he further suggests that pupils should hear a narrated version which is accurate in terms of word recognition and the sound of the sentence.

In the Read Aloud Handbook, Jim Trelease (1982) identifies several qualities that distinguish a good read aloud book fro a poor one. Trelease says that a book should be fast paced, capturing a readers interest almost immediately: "Books and readers are very much like fishing rods and fish. Since the object of every good book is to catch readers, it should come equipped with a hook - a piece of the story's framework that grabs the reader and holds him through all 24 pages or all 224 pages."

In an article written by Jessica Swaim (1984), she states that there are many children's books, both classic and contemporary, which meet the standards of excellence. Swaim is an author of talking books and it is her ipinion that it takes teamwork to produce a talking book. But most of all she says, it takes a listener. " The listener may be blind or they may be unable to hold the book or even sit up. But that person can hear. Once in awhile, some of the words heard may go past the listeners ears and travel on into his or her heart. After all, that's what talking books are for.'

As part of the related literature, reading aloud

to children will be discussed. First of all, in an article written by Wanda and Arnold Willems (1978-79), the authors discuss the various ways to draw children into the enjoyment of reading books. In their eyes, one of the most effective ways is to draw upon the child's willingness to please and imitate the adults in his/her life - parents, relatives, neighbors, and of utmost importance, teachers. Adults all influence the children through the display of their attitude toward reading. Teachers can develop positive attitudes by encouraging children to read on their own, by providing recreational reading materials, and of vital importance, showing by their words and actions that they enjoy reading. Recreational reading materials may include talking books.

A study was conducted by Robert Emans (1982), to investigate the comparative effectiveness of creative dramatics and storytelling. It was a two year study involving 298 grade school children . An experimental - control group design was used. The results showed that neither storytelling nor creative dramatics appeared to have an effect on children's interest and reading acheivement. There appears, however, to be some evidence that storytelling may have more influence than creative dramatics on self image and empathy. There is also evidence that storytelling has a greater positive

effect than creative dramatics on creativity. The findings were supported by the observations of children's librarians in the study. The children's librarians noted that the children in the story hour were responsible for circulating more books than the children in creative dramatics. There appeared to be a greater interest in finding books with the theme of the story hour than with locating books dealing with the theme of the creative dramatics program.

In an article written by Ellen Demos (1984), it describes a program in which storytellers were used to motivate readers. The program took place at the Denver Elementary School in Fort Worth, Texas. Storytellers from a local storytelling guild would visit the kindergarten through third grade twice weekly for two weeks. The storytelling took place during the first period of the day for a fifteen minute block. According to Demos, the experiment was so successful that the school decided to continue the storytelling for the rest of the year and volunteers continued to come twice a week. The best reason for using storytellers in a motivation program according to Gail Haley, 1971 Caldecott Medal recipient: " Children who are not spoken to by live and responsive sdults will not learn to speak properly... And children who are not told stories and who are not read to will have few reasons for wanting

to learn to read." (1984, pg. 804) Demos also suggests that storytelling also produces other valuable results - it fosters better listening skills as well as better verbal skills.

In December of 1980, Cynthia Butler wrote an article dealing with teachers reading aloud in the classroom. Ms. Butler believes that the results of reading aloud in the classroom are measurable. She states that reading scores improve as a result of a regular reading aloud program. In a study done by Porter (1969), it was found that reading aloud to fourth, fifth and sixth graders affected their reading interests as well as their comprehension acheivement. Surveys were conducted by the New York Public Library in conjunction with their read aloud program. They found that reluctant readers that attended the storytelling sessions had a new enthusiasm which was noted by their teachers and reinforced by the books which the children checked out. Butler (1980), syas that this was also found to be true in the school library, even though it had been less formally recorded. She concluded by saying that the benefits rise in proportion to the regularity and frequency of reading aloud.

According to Arbuthnot (1977), children can understand books on a reading level beyond their ability.

" A good book, well read, brings responses from children who could not enjoy and respond to the book on their own because their reading ability would not permit it."

Vail (1977) indicates that a poor reader gets personal, cultural, and academic benefit from being read to in the classroom. She has found that children who have not been read to will often miss obvious context clues because they lack certain skills. They can not conceive the whole picture. This lack also cuts appreciation due to word by word reading.

Sandra M^{c}Cormick (1977) cites studies which enable her to state, " Research now provides evidence of the direct relationship between reading aloud to children and reading performance, language development, and the development of reading interests." She and Bellon mention classic studies by researchers such as Chomsky, Cohen and Durkin. Their studies have found that reading aloud to children of preschool and elementary age improves vocabulary, syntax and comprehension. It was also found to be valuable to language development. Students were interacting with the story itself as well as with the person reading it. Bellon stated, " They become active users of the language." (1975, pg. 149)

The desired effect of reading aloud is influenced by two things. First, the regularity of exposure and secondly the length of time the treatment is applied.

In several studies where significant increases were shown, the frequency of reading aloud was stressed. For example, in Cohen's study second graders were read to every day of the year. In another study conducted by Bailey, first graders participated in a library program which consisted of reading and storytelling activities for an hour a day, five days a week for twelve weeks.

According to a study done by Mason and Blanton (1971), reading aloud to children can also effect their reading interests. They studied the reading interests of three, four and five year old children. One important finding was that after the children learned to read, they were more eager to read for themselves the books that had been read to them, or books of the same type, rather than other books. Mason and Blanton say, " Apparently, exposure to a good book increases one's desire to read it for himself."

Walker and Kuerbitz (1978-79) studied story time as a factor in beginning reading success, to determine the relationship between reading to preschoolers and their success in beginning reading. This included such concerns as the relationship between the desire of children to have stories read to them and success in beginning reading, the effect of frequency of story time and the extent to which this success persisted through grade three. The findings showed that their favorite stories

be read, 70% of the 10 children read to every other day requested their favorite stories and 33% of the 3 children read to once a week requested their favorite story be read. They found that there is a relationship between children's desire to have their favorite stories read frequently and first grade reading success. The data also showed that first grade reading acheivement increases with the frequency of exposure to storytime activities, but this increase is not directly proportional to the frequency of exposure. Mention should also be made of the fact that a "catching up - leveling off" process seemed to be in operation over the three year period.

Carol Lauritzen (1980) wrote an article describing the use of oral literature to teach reading skills. Stories in the oral tradition, according to Lauritzen are those with repeated wording such as Millions of Cats by Wanda Gag. She feels that in kindergarten and first grade, this type of literature done orally makes an ideal transition from being a listener to being a reader. Overall, success is enhanced by the structure and predictability of this type of literature. Lauritzen feels strongly about these stories because she believes that after several repetitions of hearing the story, the children become readers. However, at this level it is more like retelling than reading. But in any

case it provides the beginning reader with a great deal of self confidence because they view themselves as readers.

Lesley Mandel Morrow (1985) wrote an article to discuss the factors that foster the development of young voluntary readers. She cites many studies which describe home and school characteristics that encourage voluntary reading. Morrow states that there are a substantial number of students who do not choose to read either for pleasure or for information. A study by Greaney (1980) revealed that fifth grade students used only 5.4% of their leisure time reading and 22% reported not reading at all. Lamme (1976) found that developmental reading programs are often heavily skills oriented and provide little opportunity for children to read for pleasure. This is perhaps one explanation for the lack of voluntary readers. Irving (1980) stated that schools which have incorporated recreational reading programs such as sustained silent reading or reading celebration, reported that students developed positive attitudes and more enthusiasm towards reading and books.

According to the study by Morrow, skilled readers are not necessarily voluntary readers. Although a child demonstrates academic ability when tested, if a supportive literary environment is not present at home

or in school, voluntary reading habits may not develop. On the other hand, a child exposed to literature at home and in school may develop a strong interest in books in spite of demonstrating lower academic ability based on scores from standardized tests.

Morrow surveyed parents, principals and teachers to determine their attitudes toward the development of voluntary reading at school. She found that when ranked against other skills such as comprehension, word recognition and study skills, most of those surveyed placed the promotion of voluntary reading as least important. Teachers said there was little or no time to spend in the school day for the development of recreational readers. Skill development is still seen as the key to literacy.

In Lamme's study, it was also noted that when reading to children, an important factor was grouping the children in such a way that all could see the pictures and hear the story. When observed, a surprising number of teachers read and the book was not clearly visible or the children along the sides were straining to see the illustrations. Therefore, it is important to remember that it is best to provide all the children the same opportunity to see and hear while reading aloud. Since each child in the listening center receives a book and a set of headphones, this concern has been

addressed.

Judith Schickedanz (1978) lists several ways of reading to children which are effective. First she says that reading should take place in a situation that allows the children to see the print in the book. Secondly, turning the pages may help children learn the phrasing of the story. Next she says that the same story should be read to children many times to aid in the construction of the storyline. Listening posts are most effective when children have individual books to follow along in. Children also need free access to the books that are read to them at times other than storytime. Observation lists should be kept to chart children's progress and enthusiasm.

Finally, Swanson (1985) conducted a study to investigate teachers judgements of first grader's reading enthusiasm. Seven teachers classified 117 first graders as having high, average or low reading enthusiasm. The study revealed that first graders' reading ability as measured by the Metropolitan Acheivement Test, tended to be associated with teacher judgement of enthusiasm. It is also interesting to note that the teacher's report did not correspond to the student reports which were measured by self report.

A survey of 101 primary teachers revealed that although attitude is ranked as a top priority in reading,

very little time is spent on attitude development. (Alexander 1984) To maintain the positive attitudes of young readers, teachers must be aware of the vulnerability of young students toward teacher expectations (Brophy and Good, 1970) and must begin to look at ways of implementing positive motivational techniques into their beginning reading curriculum.

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